

SOUTH POLAR SKUA

Stercorarius maccormicki

nonbreeding visitor, occasional

monotypic

South Polar Skuas breed in the Shetland Is and Antarctica and disperse widely throughout the world's oceans during non-breeding seasons (May-Nov), N to Greenland and the Gulf of Alaska (Higgins and Davies 1996, AOU 1998). It was one of 4-5 similar taxa, formerly included in the genus *Catharacta* (until merged with the other jaegers into *Stercorarius* by the AOU 2000), that can hybridize and be difficult to distinguish in the field. Most or all large skuas that reach the N Pacific are South Polar Skuas; however, there is some indication that Brown Skuas (*S. lonnbergi*) of Antarctica and subantarctic islands may also occur in the North Pacific (Howell 2005). Most records of large skuas from Hawaii have shown characters diagnostic of South Polar Skua, although in some cases other species of skuas were not eliminated.

All but one record of skuas in Hawaiian waters have been observed during *at-sea* surveys or one-day boat trips offshore. H.C. Palmer reported a probable skua between Midway and O'ahu in Jul-Aug 1891 (Rothschild 1900). Of eight skuas recorded by King (1970) during monthly surveys S and E of the Southeastern Hawaiian Islands Mar 1964-Jun 1965, two were within Hawaiian waters: 17 May 1964 (about 110 km E of Hawai'i I) and 8 Sep 1964 (about 335 km NE of Maui). Other skuas were observed about 275 km NW of Kaua'i 29 Aug 1966 (W.B. King, pers. comm.), and about 335 km N of O'ahu in early Nov 1976 (Gould 1983). None of these were identified to species (*cf. E* 37:121) although chances are good they were South Polar Skuas (Spear et al. 1999) and we consider them as such here. More recent records of South Polar Skuas were of one photographed about 92 km S of Hawai'i I (18° 5' N 155° 1' W) 7 Oct 1987 (*E* 48:21; [HRBP](#) 0624-0626) and another observed 13 Nov 1989 (Spear et al. 1999). During [HICEAS](#) surveys, 12 individuals were recorded 12 Sep-10 Nov 2002, from NE of O'ahu to SSW of Kure and 7 were observed throughout these waters in May-Oct 2013 (Rowlett 2002; [HICEAS data](#)). Two together were observed 175 SW of Lisianski 7 Nov. Other skuas have been observed between Kaua'i and Nihoa 19-21 Sep 2010 (2 birds) and 3 Sep 2011; near Lehua Islet NW of *Ni'ihau* 17 Jun 2003; off *Kaua'i* 28 Jul 1993, 19 Aug 1993, 29 Jun 2000, 24 Aug 2001, 24 Jun 2003, 26 Jul 2011 (3 together, the high count for Hawaiian waters; [CRC data](#); [HRBP](#) 6556-6558; published *NAB* 65:699), 21 Sep 2013, 28 Jul 2013 ([HRBP](#) 6560; [CRC data](#)), and 5 Aug 2016 (from Secret Beach, the only record of one observed from shore); off *O'ahu* 2 and 13 Aug 1992; and off *Hawai'i I* 29 Aug 1991 and 16 Sep 2009 ([HRBP](#) 6554-6555), and by [CRC](#) on 3 Oct 2004, 12 Aug 2007 (2), 11 Nov 2007, 9 Jul 2008 ([HRBP](#) 5498-5499 published *NAB* 62:632), 20 Aug 2009 ([HRBP](#) 5746-5747), 19 Oct 2009 ([HRBP](#) 5796-5798), 16 Dec 2010 (the latest record in Hawaiian waters and not identified to species beyond skua), 2 Nov 2011 (banded on King George Island as a chick in 2006; [HRBP](#) 6559 published *NAB* 66:192), 28 Jul 2014, and 24 Oct 2014 ([CRC data](#)). There are several other records of probable South Polar Skuas in Hawaiian waters (e.g., *E* 31:98).

[Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

[Literature cited](#)

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